

RESPECTING OUR ANCESTRAL PRACTICE: MORNING BELL CHANT PART 2

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» 5 Amitabul

WON A JIN SAENG MU BYOL LYOM
Vow I exhaust life no other thought
I vow for my whole life, without separate mind,

A-MI-TA BUL DOK SANG SU
Amita Buddha uniquely marked follow
to only follow Amitabul, the Buddha with unique marks.

SHIM SHIM SANG GYE OK HO GWANG
Mind mind always joins jade curl light
The Mind of Minds always connects to the jewel of wisdom's light.

YOM NYOM BUL LI GUM SAEK SANG
Thought-moment thought-moment not leave golden form marked
Moment to moment, without leaving this golden form,

A JIP YOM JU BOP KYE GWAN
I hold thought beads dharma world perceive
I hold beads, perceiving this world.

HO GONG WI SUNG MU BUL GWAN
Empty space is string nothing not strung
Emptiness is a string that leaves nothing unstrung.

PYONG DUNG SA-NA MU HA CHO
Equal rank Vairocana has no certain place
Vairocana is everywhere, everything is equal.

GWAN GU SO BANG A-MI-TA
Perceive pray west region Amita
Contemplate the Western Amita.

NA-MU SO BANG DAE GYO JU
Namu west region great teaching master
Become one with the Great Western Master,

MU RYANG SU YO RAE BUL
No limit long life thus come Buddha
Infinite Time, Infinite Space, Thus Come Buddha.

NA-MU A-MI-TA BUL
Namu Amita Buddha
Become One with Amitabul.

After introducing us to Vairocana, the great cosmic Buddha of the Avatamsaka Sutra, the chant now brings forward another cosmic Buddha, Amitabha, the Buddha who established the Western Pure Land for the benefit of all beings. There will be more about the Western Pure Land and Amitabha's vows later in the chant.

Amitabha's name means "infinite light" ("a-" in Sanskrit is a negative prefix like "un-" or "in-"; "mita" means "measure"; "bha" means "light.") The name is often shortened to "Amita," with "bul," meaning "Buddha," added to it to produce the form "Amitabul" in Chinese and Korean. Amitabul's light comes from his *urna*, the curl of white hairs between his eyebrows (the "jade curl," a kind of third eye, one of the thirty-two marks of a Buddha) and illuminates the universe. Amitabha and Vairocana, whose name means "shining like the sun," have different origins, but it is natural that these two luminous cosmic Buddhas are paired in this chant, or even identified with each other, as they seem to be in this section.

Equally noteworthy in this section is the blending of Pure Land teaching—constant devotion to Amitabul as the basis of practice and liberation—with the Hwa Yen philosophy of emptiness and universal interconnection. The Mind of Minds, which is our ordinary mind,

always connects to Amitabul's light. We never leave the golden form of the universe. Practicing with meditation beads—*yom ju*—we perceive the dharma world, the world as it actually is, and recognize that emptiness, the space of no hindrance, connects everything just as string connects the beads we are holding. When we practice, repeating *Namu Amitabul* (the essential Pure Land practice) as we move the beads, each bead corresponds to a *yom* (a word also spelled *lyom* and *nyom* in this section), a thought-moment, a moment of consciousness. In this way, Pure Land practice and Zen practice are not different.

This section begins with a vow to become one with Amitabul and ends with the practice—the repetition of *Namu Amitabul*—that actualizes that vow. I have always been struck by Zen Master Seung Sahn's translation of *namu* as "become one with." The meaning of the word in Sanskrit is given as "pay homage, venerate, praise" but also as "take refuge with." Understanding it as "become one with" eliminates the subject-object separation implicit in the other translations. It is not that we go to Amitabul, who then saves us, but that we become Amitabul. This is the spirit of practice in the Morning Bell Chant, and it will find poetic expression in the verses that begin the next section.

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